

**STATEMENT OF DANIEL N. WENK, DEPUTY DIRECTOR, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING S. 500 AND H.R. 512, BILLS TO ESTABLISH THE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE POTENTIAL CREATION OF A NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN LATINO COMMUNITY TO DEVELOP A PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF A NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN LATINO COMMUNITY IN WASHINGTON, DC**

**March 20, 2007**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the Department of the Interior's views on S. 500 and H.R. 512, bills to establish the Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of the American Latino Community (Commission) to develop a plan of action for the establishment and maintenance of a National Museum of the American Latino Community in Washington, D.C.

The Department has no objection to the concept of establishing a commission to study the potential creation of a national museum for the American Latino community, and we suggest that a technical correction be made to S. 500 to make it consistent with the House-passed companion bill, H.R. 512. We note that other agencies, such as the Smithsonian Institution, may be able to provide more insight on the benefits as well as the significant budget implications of establishing and operating a separate museum in this time of constrained budgets. We suggest that the General Services Administration (GSA) rather than the Department of the Interior provide the administrative support, since it is our understanding that the GSA has an office set up to provide such services for other commissions.

S. 500 and H.R. 512 would establish a Commission to study and report on the potential creation of a museum, the availability and cost of collections to be acquired and housed in the museum, possible locations, the organizational structure from which the museum should operate, and how to engage the American Latino Community in the development and design of a museum. The Commission would consist of 23 voting and non-voting members appointed by the President and Congressional leadership. The legislation would require that the Commission convene a national conference on the museum no later than 18 months after the commission members are selected and submit recommendations for a legislative plan to create and construct the museum based on the findings of its study no later than 24 months after the date of the Commission's first meeting. The bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to provide administrative services, facilities, and funds necessary for the operation of the Commission with funds made available prior to any meetings of the Commission.

We suggest that S. 500 and H.R. 512 be amended to drop the requirement that the Secretary of the Interior provide administrative services, facilities, and funds necessary for the operation of the Commission as well as determine the daily rate of compensation for Commission members. The Department does not have available funds to provide such support. We suggest, alternatively, that the General Services Administration (GSA) provide such administrative support. We recommend a technical correction be made to S. 500 to specify the Committees to receive the report containing the Commission's recommendations for a plan of action and the report on issues.

We appreciate that both S. 500 and H.R. 512 have been improved over the past versions of the legislation by providing the Commission with a full opportunity to consider a wide variety of potentially appropriate and worthy locations for the museum and directing the Commission to consult with the National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts during such consideration. This requirement supports the purpose and follows guidelines provided by the “Memorials and Museums Master Plan,” described further below. Previous proposals contained provisions limiting the study to specific sites to be considered including locations on or near the National Mall.

The location for a museum is of paramount importance to all federal agencies, including the Department of the Interior, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the Commission of Fine Arts. In September 2001, the Commission of Fine Arts, the National Capital Planning Commission, and the Department of the Interior through the Secretary’s National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission, adopted the Memorials and Museums Master Plan (2M Plan) to guide the location of new memorials, museums, and related structures in the Nation’s Capital. The 2M Plan states that future memorials and museums should be precluded from being located in “The Reserve,” an area described as the great cross-axis of the National Mall extending from the United States Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial and from the White House to the Jefferson Memorial. Congress concurred with the need to protect The Reserve from overdevelopment, calling this area “a substantially completed work of civic art,” and, on November 13, 2003, with enactment of amendments to the Commemorative Works Act, The Reserve was established by statute. The amendments also preclude commemorative works which are primarily designed as museums from being located on parkland in Area I or in East Potomac Park. In addition, the

National Capital Planning Commission and the Commission of Fine Arts, in partnership with the National Park Service and other key federal and local agencies, are developing a National Capital Framework Plan that will facilitate use of some of the 2M Plan sites for nationally significant museums and memorials. Both the 2M Plan and the National Capital Framework Plan will provide useful guidance to the new Commission.

The National Park Service is proud to be the steward of monuments along Virginia Avenue to commemorate Spanish General Bernardo de Galvez, ally to the American colonies during the American Revolution, and four South American heroes, Simon Bolivar, Jose de San Martin, Benito Pablo Juarez, and Jose Gervasio Artigas. All five statues were memorial gifts to the people of the United States from the people of Spain, Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay to recognize these liberators of Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay. These memorials celebrate the bonds between our nations; and while American Latinos have the opportunity to trace their ancestry back to these origins, there is no permanent historical context in Washington, D.C. that provides an opportunity to focus on the significant cultural events and contributions representing these citizens of the United States.

We support, in concept, the proposal to further the education and interpretation of significant segments of American history and culture, however, we feel strongly that this Commission move forward in a way that does not contravene the thoughtful and comprehensive plans undertaken to govern the growth of the Nation's Capital or weaken the protections which Congress has provided to the National Mall.

If the subcommittee decides to move S. 500 instead of H.R. 512, we recommend that the technical correction be made to S. 500 to make it consistent with the House-passed companion bill, H.R. 512. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.